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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage December 19 on the judges' ruling to uphold the earlier decision to release former President Chen Shui-bian without bail; on the cabinet's unveiling of sample consumption vouchers; and on the crash-landing in southern Taiwan of a United States-built Chinook helicopter of Taiwan's army. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" pointed out several flaws in the Ma Ying-jeou Administration's defense concept and urged that the Administration consult closely with the United States and Japan on Taiwan's defense.

"Taiwan Needs Caution in Military Rform"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" circulation: 20,000 editorialized (12/18):

"... There are worrisome flaws in Ma's defense concept.

"First, the KMT president's calls for a 'diplomatic truce' or a reduction or elimination of the over 1,000 missiles deployed by the PRC military across from Taiwan have gone unheeded, and Beijing continues to insist on its 'one-China principle,' which arrogantly posits that Taiwan is part of the PRC, and refuses to renounce the use of force against Taiwan to ensure 'unification.'

"Second, China's economic rise may be creating business opportunities but it is also fueling the continued double-digit expansion of the PRC's military budget that is spurring the exacerbation of a dangerous imbalance in military force capabilities in the Taiwan Strait.

"Moreover, there is no certainty that China's economic development will lead to political democratization or social stability in the PRC itself. There are also no guarantees that future Chinese governments, democratic or otherwise, will respect the independence of Taiwan or the right of free choice of Taiwan's 23 million people to determine their own national identity or destiny.

"Moreover, Taiwan's military development and defense strategy are deeply intertwined with democratic allies such as the U.S. and Japan and their security partners in the Asia-Pacific region, all of whom will be shocked and discomfited if Taiwan does not consult with them before retreating from 'active defense' to 'passive defense.'

"Combined with the spreading of illusions that 'peace is breaking out' in the Taiwan Strait, such a unilateral decision could well reduce the willingness of Washington and Tokyo to assist Taiwan defend itself from possible PRC intimidation or active threats if the touted cross-strait reconciliation falters. ..."

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